

### **Abstract**

The invention provides safe and effective methods for treating and preventing prion diseases by administering a therapeutically effective amount of at least one cholinesterase inhibitor. A preferred cholinesterase inhibitor is donepezil, stereoisomers thereof, or pharmaceutically acceptable salts thereof, such as ARICEPT®. Prion diseases, which are characterized by one or more symptoms of dementia and/or cognitive impairments, include, for example, Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, Gerstmann-Sträussler-Scheinker disease, fatal familial insomnia, and kuru. In other embodiments, the invention provides methods for treating cognitive impairments due to surgery by administering a therapeutically effective amount of at least one cholinesterase inhibitor.